

## Chapter 5

### **Commission Recommendations for the Implementation Process: The Creation of a *Youth Services Coordinating Commission***

The Commission recognizes that cultural and institutional change is at the heart of many its recommendations. The successful path to reforms posed in this document will require a renewed commitment to children and families, but also a drive toward a new vision of what it means to work with children and youth. For this reason, the Commission passed the following resolution outlining steps to support the implementation effort:

**MOTION, To establish a Youth Services Coordinating Commission, whose responsibility will be to oversee, monitor and coordinate a policy vision for a youth development and juvenile justice system in the District of Columbia.** The Youth Services Coordinating Commission will be charged to implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform, modify existing programs and promote innovative programs, and ensure the seamless delivery of services and opportunities for the city's youth. The Commission's authority should be derived first and initially from the Mayor, who will serve as Chair of the Commission. Within 90 days from the sunset of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform, legislation will be submitted by the Mayor establishing the Youth Services Coordinating Commission.

A high profile Commission appointed by the Mayor of the District of Columbia is recommended to be the authority to strengthen performance and accountability for youth safety and

development and juvenile justice reform in the District of Columbia. In the absence of a unified youth development agency in the District of Columbia, the Commission is also urgently needed to assure that the District of Columbia comes into compliance with the fifteen year old *Jerry M.* decree.

The Youth Services Coordinating Commission is viewed as absolutely essential to overcome the complexity and challenges of the District's bifurcated juvenile justice system. It is also conceived as a much-needed support for the Mayor of the District of Columbia in management, service delivery reforms, and the community in its prioritization of children and youth.

Primary functions of the YSC Commission include the following but should not be limited in terms of the Commission's core duty to:

- Provide a knowledge building and governance framework to bridge youth development, juvenile justice, and other governmental functions responsibilities needed to maintain a seamless delivery of services and opportunities for youth across public and private entities.
- Establish and adhere to specific, measurable and time sensitive goals (i.e., reduction of school suspensions and truancy, review of recidivism data from the Court, policy guidance regarding services for youth in underserved populations and geographic areas of the city, and youth development training for all youth workers).

- Assure the District's compliance to the *Jerry M.* decree within two years; the timely demolition of Oak Hill, construction of a secure, state of the art cottage like facility, and the continued expansion of high quality community based programming and facilities.
- Coordinate policy and outcome based planning across agencies and maintain responsibility for the creation of innovative programs.
- Ensure the collection, analysis, evaluation and public reporting of youth data from a variety of contexts in the public and private sector.

With these objectives in mind, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommends that the following occur:

- Within thirty (30) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Mayor should establish the Youth Services Coordinating Commission by Mayoral Order and submit to the Council of the District of Columbia proposed legislation statutorily creating the Youth Services Coordinating Commission;
- Within thirty (30) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Mayor should appoint a diverse and interdisciplinary body composed of representatives from youth, government, community, academia, and the private sector to constitute the Youth Services Coordinating Commission. The Commission also recommends that the Mayor personally be present to Chair the body in its first year of operation. All Deputy Mayors should be members of the Commission. The Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, and Families would be the appropriate lead alternate for the Mayor. In addition, a "Whip" should be appointed to serve as an Executive Director/Chief of Staff.;

- Within ninety (90) days of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report, the Council of the District of Columbia should enact a statute establishing a Youth Services Coordinating Commission, consistent with the principles and rationale outlined herein;
- Within ninety (90) days adequate appropriations for staff and composition of a budget should be given to the Commission to perform its functions.

Specifically, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission was developed in conversations held among Legislative and Governance Subcommittee members. Commission members of both Subcommittees agreed that the proposed commission should coordinate activities across agencies, as well as create innovative programs. It should also function as a highly visible and prominent body. While the proposed Commission should be responsible for establishment and maintenance of a focus on specific and measurable goals, Subcommittee members recommended that the Commission not be responsible for program operation. Ideally, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission will ensure that the broad recommendations by the Blue Ribbon Commission are implemented in an efficient and seamless manner through collaboration and cooperation the various stakeholders.

Two models for the Youth Services Coordinating Commission were discussed within the Governance Subcommittee. Primarily, debate centered around the role of community stakeholders, and whether or not engagement of communities broader than governmental entities might raise concerns about information sharing. Given that community support and involvement are strong

components to the success of youth programs, involvement from a diverse array of stakeholders with the establishment of requisite protocols was viewed as necessary for future success. In addition to outlining the overall function and responsibilities of the Youth Services Commission, the Legislative and Governance Subcommittees proposed that Mayor Williams serve as Chair of the Youth Services Commission and that he be personally present at all meetings during the first year of operation in order to achieve the necessary visibility and effectiveness. Moreover, all Deputy Mayors should be represented as well as an appointed “Whip” who will serve as the Commission’s Executive Director/Chief of Staff.

In terms of potential membership, Governance Subcommittee members recommend that the Mayor create a broad and diverse interdisciplinary body, and that he invite a range of representatives from government, community, academia, and the private and youth sectors. Potential members might include representatives from among the following public and private entities: DC Public Schools, Youth Services Administration, Department of Parks and Recreation, Metropolitan Police Department, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health, Department of Child and Family Services, Department of Human Services, Council of the District of Columbia, Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, and Workforce Investment Council (WIC)/Youth Investment Council. Recommendations also called for representation from professional associations and organizations, including individuals from business, faith based groups (e.g. Inter-Faith Council), and social welfare entities (e.g. Child Welfare Consortium).

Finally, while the primary functions of the Youth Services Commission are to coordinate a policy vision and enforce accountability for strong youth outcomes, specific responsibilities

outlined by the Blue Ribbon Commission of Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform, the Mayor and City Council should also invest the body with the authority to take any action to bring the District into compliance with *Jerry M.* within two years. Adequate staffing and budget should be allocated or provided to ensure that necessary resources are given to the proposed commission. Overall, the Youth Services Coordinating Commission should be given the authority and power to monitor and coordinate the recommendations set forth by the Blue Ribbon Commission in order to promote strategies that overcome all barriers--- judicial, bureaucratic or otherwise.

### ***Guiding Principles***

In setting the agenda for youth services delivery, the Commission endorsed a core set of guiding principles for operation of programs and principles of leadership for child and youth-serving staff. These themes are viewed as integral to the preservation of a unified policy visions for juvenile justice and youth services in general. They include the following principles:

- There should be a strong emphasis on child and youth friendly workers. Workers should be exposed to ongoing professional training in youth and community development.
- Whether functioning in the public or private sector, youth workers should always function as child advocates.
- High quality research should guide programming and policy.

- Youth should be held accountable for antisocial behavior.
- Youth should have programming options that are age, gender, and culturally appropriate.
- The juvenile justice system must operate in a fair and just manner for all children.
- The District of Columbia- including the District of Columbia Courts, the City Council, District agencies, and local communities- should support safe and nurturing environments for children and youth in the juvenile justice system.